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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIJING 002333

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR CA/VO, EAP/CM AND EUR/WE

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [CVIS](#) [ETRD](#) [KOLY](#) [FR](#) [CH](#)
SUBJECT: FRENCH AMBASSADOR: BEIJING PUNISHES FRANCE BY
WITHHOLDING TOURISTS

REF: BEIJING 1570

Classified By: Classified by Charge d'Affaires a.i. Dan Piccata. Reason
s 1.4 (B/D).

¶11. (C) Summary: The Beijing Tourism Bureau recently ordered all Beijing-based travel agencies to remove brochures and catalogues advertising trips to France, and to stop selling packages, French Ambassador Herve Ladsous told the Charge June 7. Ladsous said the order has resulted in a two-thirds drop in visa applications at the French Embassy in Beijing, and the French Embassy has heard rumors that Air France is planning to reduce the number of flights between Beijing and Paris. The French Embassy believes the drop in travel to France is a result of Beijing officials' anger at the Paris City Government for granting the Dalai Lama honorary citizenship and a reaction to the well-publicized pro-Tibet protests at the Paris leg of the Olympic Torch Relay. Despite French Embassy and EU Commission protests to both the Beijing and National Tourism Bureaus, the Beijing Tourism Bureau denies that any official boycott exists and has taken no remedial action. If the situation does not improve, the French Embassy intends to take legal action. End Summary.

The Announcement and Its Effect

¶12. (C) During a meeting held by the Beijing Tourism Bureau in late May, 200 Chinese travel agents were told to cease sending tourists to France, French Ambassador Herve Ladsous told the Charge June 7. The Tourism Bureau instructed the agents to remove all brochures which describe vacations in France, and to remove the pages which deal specifically with France from catalogues that detail multiple countries. From early this month, the French Embassy in Beijing reported a two-thirds drop in the number of applications for Schengen visas, compared with the same time period over the past three years. The French consulates in Guangzhou and Shanghai have not reported a similar drop, nor have the other Schengen visa-issuing nations reported an increase in applications to make up for the decline in applications at the French Embassy. The French Embassy has heard rumors that Air France plans to decrease the number of direct flights from Beijing to Paris over the coming months, as the flights are not currently operating at capacity.

Possible Reasons: Dalai Lama and the Torch

¶13. (C) According to the French Ambassador, the French Embassy surmises that the assault on French tourism was ordered by Beijing Mayor Guo Jinlong, in response to Paris Mayor Bertrand Delanoe's awarding honorary Parisian citizenship to the Dalai Lama. Guo had written to Delanoe to protest the citizenship award, and described the Parisian Mayor's response as "belated and unhelpful." The French Embassy also blames popular outcry following well-publicized pro-Tibet

protests during the Paris leg of the Olympic Torch Relay, which ultimately resulted in widespread calls in China for a boycott of French products and services (reftel). The French Embassy surmises that the Chinese travel agents will not change their policies unless officially instructed to do so, and as such plan to continue pressuring the Chinese until the problem is resolved.

Arguing: France vs. China

14. (C) Ambassador Ladsous told the Charge that after the purported boycott announcement, French Secretary of State for Trade Anne-Marie Idrac informed Commerce Vice Minister Yu Guangzhou that the current policy on tourism to France "will not stand." The French Ambassador registered his protest to the chair of the Chinese National Tourism Bureau, and in response received a "tepid communique" supporting "healthy tourism development as a bridge to international friendship."

The response did not contravene the current Beijing order to stop selling tour packages to France. The Beijing Tourism Board, which the French Embassy suspects ordered the boycott, denied in a June 11 meeting with French Ambassador Ladsous that any such officially sanctioned boycott exists. Instead, they hypothesized that the Chinese people "just don't want to go to France" because of the "shock" of the Paris torch relay.

The Next Step: Legal Action

15. (C) The French Government will take legal action if no

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further solutions are forthcoming, French First Secretary Emmanuel Loirot told PolOff June 12. EU Commission Head of Delegation Serge Abou met with Chinese Ministry of Commerce Authorities June 7, and informed them that a boycott of French tourism breaches an existing China-EU agreement on EU countries' "Approved Destination Status." Within the past week there has been a "slight rebound" in the number of visas issued by the French Embassy, but there is still a large gap between the current application volume and the numbers for the same time period from the last three years. "We will not just cross our fingers and hope, or cross our arms and watch," Loirot said, emphasizing that in the future, legal action may be the only remaining course.

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